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SUBJECT: WOMEN LEAD MOROCCO'S "PETITE REVOLUTION"

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[1](#)B. RABAT 0485

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In what is being hailed in the press as the "petite revolution," a dozen women have been elected by their men and women peers to chair local councils, making them mayors or the equivalent rural executives. Prior to the June 12 municipal elections, only one woman had ever served as mayor of a Moroccan city. A U.S.-educated woman became a regional celebrity when she was elected as the Mayor of Marrakesh, Morocco's biggest tourist destination, but on July 13 the election in her district was invalidated due to voting irregularities. The mayor's post will be left open for now, and if appeals fail, there will be a revote. Women won 3,400 seats around the Kingdom in the election, a twenty-five fold increase in elected women officials in the country. Although most were elected on a reserved women's list, hundreds were elected on general lists, at least tripling the number elected in competition with men. With the women relatively more qualified than their male counterparts, this marks a turning point for women's political participation in Morocco. Morocco now has more elected women officials than any other Arab country and has dramatically increased the visibility of women as leaders and policy makers, a critical step in shattering gender stereotypes and eliminating discrimination against women. End Summary.

Women as Political Actors

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Government of Morocco's (GOM,s) emphasis on bringing more women into the political sphere is likely to have a lasting long-term impact on women's political participation. For the first time but likely not the last, women played a central role in the election process and outcome.

[1](#)3. (SBU) As both candidates and voters, women participated in this election in greater numbers than ever before. As reported Ref B, an astonishing 20,400 women ran for office, nearly 16 percent of the total number of candidates. Just a decade ago, women made up less than 2 percent of candidates in the municipal elections and held few seats in local government. Embassy election observers noted that, in some areas, women voters outnumbered men by two to one.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Despite some resistance by the political parties, women were generally well represented on the party lists (in addition to the lists reserved for female candidates). Women candidates were elected from the party lists in greater numbers than ever before, illustrating the growing political clout of the increasing number of female politicians who would have been elected even without a quota. In Morocco,

council members both from the regular and reserved lists get together and elect from their number a chair, who has executive power as the mayor, then go on to similarly choose provincial, regional and national representatives.

Involving Women the Cornerstone of Success

15. (SBU) To maximize their electoral share, political parties have felt the competitive pressure to recruit and promote women candidates in order to gain the maximum number of reserved seats, as well as additional campaign funds from the GOM. Those parties that resisted giving women valuable slots on the general party lists (reftel), restricting their female candidates to the bare minimum required under the quota, fared poorly in the elections. The Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) was particularly impacted by this practice, as many of its strongest female activists defected to other parties, such as the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) after unsuccessfully lobbying for top seats on the ticket. One USFP candidate noted, "The government and the people may be ready for women leaders, but the political parties are not."

16. (SBU) In contrast, PAM's successful recruitment of women candidates likely played a key role in the party's significant showing in the elections. PAM did the best job of enlisting women for its ticket, highlighting women candidates during the election and keeping women candidates in the spotlight. Prior to the election, PAM aggressively targeted female incumbents from other parties, offering top spots on the party lists to those who defected, a tempting

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offer for those women who were at the time fighting their own parties for equivalent treatment.

17. (SBU) The Islamist-inspired Party of Justice and Development (PJD) was likely the second best recruiter of women. Embassy contacts reported that many women were attracted to the PJD because it is considered the most transparent and honest party with internal democratic practices (contrasted with the smoky back room decision making and "old-boy" networks of the older parties).

PAM Uses Women to Debate Modern Values

18. (SBU) PAM used its women candidates to distinguish itself from other parties and to put forth a vision of Morocco that embraces modernity and the relatively new Moudawana (the revised Family Code, which is gaining increasing application). The emphasis on women helped PAM win the most votes and most seats of any party in the council election.

19. (SBU) PAM candidate Fatima Zohra Mansouri, who studied law in the U.S. and is a descendant of the Pasha of Marrakesh, was elected by the council to be the Mayor of Marrakesh, Morocco's premier tourist destination. However, due to voting irregularities in the district from which she was elected, an administrative tribunal discarded the election results and is requiring a revote. The press reported on July 13 that Mansouri was removed as Mayor pending the outcome of the new elections. However, the PAM is planning to appeal this decision. Given that Mansouri, a mother of two young children who prefers professional Western suits, has become Morocco's most recognizable elected woman leader, a regional celebrity, and something of a test case for women leaders elsewhere, we expect PAM to push hard for her to regain her seat as Mayor. Should the revote take place, we expect Mansouri to regain her seat.

110. (SBU) Carrying its modernizing message to rural voters, the PAM nominated Fatima Boujnah, a 21 year old, educated,

rural woman to be president of her municipal council. She has broken ground as the youngest woman to be elected as a council president. Prior to the election, she had been working to improve social welfare in her town and has announced that education and literacy, especially for girls, will be a major focus of her tenure.

¶11. (SBU) Another well-publicized PAM candidate, U.S.-educated Kawtar Benahmou, appeared on a tractor (the PAM symbol) during the campaign wearing a tank top, long hair, and fashion sunglasses. This image, probably the most widely publicized picture from the electoral campaign, contrasted sharply with the full-length chador-clad women candidates of the Islamist-inspired PJD, and the PJD's emphasis on "properly" wearing the veil (not with tight jeans, for example). It should be noted, however, that the PJD, which has a strong component of women activists, also elected a large number of women.

The Need for a Quota

¶12. (SBU) Although the greater inclusion of women in public life has been widely applauded in urban centers, resistance to women as political actors persists in rural and semi-urban areas. According to a MEPI-funded focus group study on perceptions of women in politics, men in these areas continue to strongly oppose female leadership of their communities. This strong opposition justified the imposition of a quota on women's participation, asserted political activist Nouzha Ameziane. "Without the quota, the number of elected women would have increased, but just barely," she insisted, adding that greater numbers of women leaders will accustom the Moroccan public to seeing women in positions of power and pave the way for greater gender equity in politics.

Quality, Not Just Quantity

¶13. (SBU) The influx of these new women leaders, selectively recruited for their educational and professional qualifications, has had the added advantage of raising the average level of education of elected officials overseeing the services provided by local governments, including water,

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electricity, sanitation, public transportation and economic development. According to the GOM, more than 70 percent of the women elected hold secondary degrees or higher. In comparison, only 50 percent of elected men have reached the same level of education.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) The outcome of the June 12 election was a major leap forward by Moroccan women, capping a decade of increasing political involvement. On top of the roughly 10 percent in the Chamber of Deputies (Parliament's lower house), women constitute 21 percent of the ministers nominated by the King to Prime Minister El Fassi's Council of Ministers. The success of the PAM, which made women the center of their campaign strategy, was a particularly salient lesson to its political rivals that increasing inclusion of women in politics will actually confer an electoral advantage. This appeal to political self-interest should help broaden political support for the Palace's efforts to use women's political participation to advance social development. The next phase of consolidation will depend on the performance of the newly installed women leaders. Their success, and public acknowledgment of that success, will advance the cause of gender equality in Moroccan society.

¶15. (SBU) The Mission will continue to monitor how women fare in contests for the regional, provincial, and upper house of Parliament seats, as these cascading elections take place over the next few months. We have also begun an initial program of training some of the elected women councilors, in this case preparing them to contest the indirect elections for the provincial and regional councils and which fill one third of the upper house. We are looking at possibilities for additional training and support for the new office holders, including long-term mentoring, from both existing and possible new USG-funded programs, as part of an increasing gender focus in our assistance programs and mission plan. As part of this, we may wish to see how our existing programs and resources can be focused or deployed to support and encourage this new generation of women activists and politicians. End Comment.

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